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Supporting Development Research: An Assessment of the Specifics of IDRC's Approach to Program Delivery

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Executive Summary

IDRC's approach to program delivery is based on direct, expert contact and appears, as is commonly held across the Centre, to be extremely labour intensive. Through a series of workshops held with Centre staff, fourteen characteristics which typify IDRC's approach to program delivery were identified. They include:

1. Talent Scouting and Spotting
2. Flexible and Responsive Funding
3. Motivating for Research Quality
4. Collegial Relationships with Research Partners
5. Linking Research to the Development Context
6. Institutionalization of Research for Development
7. Research Networking
8. Donor Linkages
9. Access to Canadian Expertise
10. Targeted Capacity Building
11. Supportive and Comprehensive Monitoring
12. Expert Technical and Methodological Input
13. Intense Professional Commitment
14. Corporate Level Issues

A sample of forty evaluation reports, produced over the past decade, was scanned for the factors identified as influencing project outcomes. Four hundred and seven factors were identified in the forty reports. These were then compared to the fourteen characteristics of IDRC's approach. The results of the analysis indicates a congruence between the characteristics of the IDRC approach as defined in the workshops and the factors that evaluators reported had affected project outcomes. Eighty-four percent of the determining factors were related to the IDRC characteristics while 16% were unrelated to, or beyond, IDRC's influence. The determining factors are not mutually exclusive; they come in clusters. A quarter of the evaluation reports note eight or more of the fourteen IDRC characteristics as influencing project outcomes.

Based on the number of times they were mentioned by the evaluators, the four most important characteristics of IDRC's approach to program delivery are:

- providing expert technical and methodological input;
- promoting the institutionalization of research for development;
- building research capacity;
- and, promoting research networking.

They represent 45% of the factors identified as influencing project outcomes and 24 of the 40 evaluation reports mentioned three or all four of these characteristics.

A trend in negative comments about IDRC's involvement with development research projects was noted. A negative comment meant that the factor was not, or was not sufficiently, present and the evaluator commented that its presence would have benefited the project. In total, 12% of the 341 determining factors related to IDRC were negative; however, they are becoming more frequent. Between 1994 and 1996, the negative comments remained under 10% but in 1997 and 1998 they jumped to 24% and 39% respectively.

The IDRC characteristic with the most negative comments was the Centre's ability to provide supportive and comprehensive monitoring. The issue requires further study but the evidence collected from the evaluation reports suggests that the problem is becoming more acute. 41% (7/17) of the determining factors related to IDRC monitoring were negative and the majority of these comments were made in evaluation reports prepared during the past three years.

This study is a first step in a process of defining IDRC's place among development research funding agencies. Further examination could take a number of different directions, including comparisons with appropriate organizations or a study assessing the research environments in which IDRC operates.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Methodology 2

Results of the Study
- Step One: Workshops 3
- Step Two: Analysis of the Evaluation Reports 4
- Characteristics Not Identified in the Evaluation Reports 4
- Positive versus Negative Factors 5

The Characteristics of IDRC's Approach
1) Expert Technical and Methodological Input 6
2) Institutionalization of Research for Development 8
3) Targeted Capacity Building 9
4) Research Networking Within the Scientific Community 10
5) Flexible and Responsive Funding 11
6) Talent Scouting and Spotting 12
7) Access to Canadian Experts 13
8) Motivating for Research Quality 14
9) Linking Research to the Development Context 15
10) Supportive and Comprehensive Monitoring 16
11) Donor Linkages 17
12) Collegial Relationships with Research Partners 17

Other Factors Influencing Project Outcome 18

Conclusion
- Summary of Results 19
- Recommendations for Further Research 20

Appendices
- Appendix 1: List of Evaluation Reports 22
- Appendix 2: Synthesis of Workshop Findings 25
- Appendix 3: Number of Evaluation Reports that Commented on Each Characteristic of IDRC's Approach to Program Delivery 28

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, IDRC has undergone a significant transition in the way it structures its operations, organizes its staff, and approaches its programming. These organizational and philosophical shifts were intended to promote more effective and efficient program delivery and adapt dominant scientific paradigms to the development needs of societies and circumstances in developing regions. The transition took place in the context of decreasing government funding levels, increased reliance on non-parliamentary funding, and shifting perspectives on development assistance. Given these changes in the internal and external contexts, IDRC has begun to reflect on whether its traditional mode of operation is still possible and appropriate. This report examines the labour intensive programming approach traditionally employed by IDRC in order to help inform the discussion of the desirability and feasibility of the Centre continuing to work in this way. It defines the key characteristics of IDRC's approach to supporting development research and then uses existing evaluation reports to show which characteristics of this approach have been assessed as important in determining project outcomes.

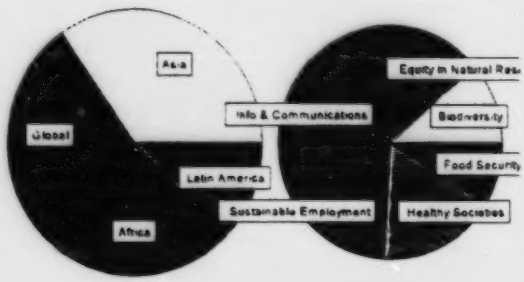
This study is intended to assist senior management of IDRC with policy and operational decisions and to help explain IDRC's approach to funders and partner agencies. Further work on contextual factors and current capacity would be necessary in order to comment on if, and how, the Centre could alter its mode of operation to be more effective in the future. This report does not directly address the issue of whether IDRC occupies a specific niche among development funding agencies. That would require a comparison of the approaches of several agencies. However, in documenting the factors which IDRC evaluations associate with effective development research, it lays the groundwork for such a comparative study.

Methodology

The probability of obtaining biased results complicated the Evaluation Unit's choice of methodology for assessing IDRC's approach to program delivery. In designing this study we were concerned that recipients, if questioned about IDRC's approach, might be apprehensive about criticizing the Centre or that the specifics of past projects might have been forgotten or muddled with other, more recent, events. In order to assess the features of IDRC's program delivery over a longer period of time, a meta-analysis of the findings of a sample of forty evaluation reports completed over the past ten years was carried out. Although the evaluation reports focus on a variety of issues relative to single projects, groups of projects, networks, specific institutions, or programming areas, this study aggregates and interprets their findings to address corporate level issues. This methodology is based on two assumptions: first, that the IDRC approach is operationalized through its program support to projects, institutions, and networks; and second, that although these evaluations were not designed to address the specific issues of concern to this study, their comments on the determinants of project outcomes are relevant and can be aggregated. Such information is useful because the determining factors reflect, either positively or negatively, on IDRC's mode of operation despite changing conditions, concepts, and contexts in which the Centre has operated. This methodology does not purport to be definitive. However, based on evaluations conducted over the past decade, it does provide insight into the way IDRC operates.

A sample of forty evaluation reports was selected from among the 212 which have been produced since 1988. Selection criteria aimed at obtaining regional and thematic representation. Box 1 shows the representational breakdown by region and theme. Three-quarters of the evaluations were carried out by external evaluators under contract to IDRC. There was an unavoidable under-representation of evaluation reports focussing on Africa because although it is a regional focus for spending, African projects are not evaluated as often as those in Latin America and Asia.[1] (See Appendix 1 for an alphabetical list of the evaluations included in the analysis)

Box 1: Evaluation Reports by Region & Theme (N=40)



[1] See Trish Wind's "A Profile of IDRC Evaluators" in The Annual Corporate Evaluation Report 1997, 10.

Through workshops with Centre staff, the defining characteristics of IDRC's approach were identified. It is an approach based on direct, expert contact and appears, as is commonly held across the Centre, to be highly labour and time intensive. These characteristics were then compared to the factors identified in evaluation reports as having influenced the outcomes of Centre-funded projects. A quantitative analysis of the qualitative data in the evaluation reports was conducted.

Results of the Study

Step One: Workshops

In two participatory workshops, Centre staff produced a list of thirty activities that IDRC normally performs in supporting development research projects. These activities were then framed into the fourteen main characteristics which typify IDRC's approach to program delivery. (See Box 2 and Appendix 2) These characteristics cover the range of activities carried out by Program Officers whose efforts actualize the Centre's philosophy and policies. Program staff provide a wide variety of inputs and spend a great deal of time assisting the research team throughout project design and implementation. For instance, providing targeted capacity building (Characteristic 10) can involve arranging training seminars and secondments abroad, helping design a training workshop, identifying institutions and individuals with potential, and linking the research team with Canadian experts.

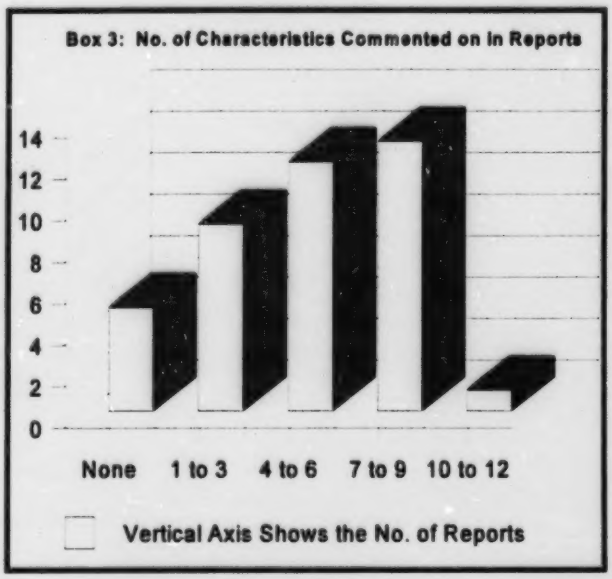
Box 2: The IDRC Approach to Program Delivery

1. Talent Scouting & Spotting
2. Flexible & Responsive Funding
3. Motivating for Research Quality
4. Collegial Relationships with Research Partners
5. Linking Research to the Development Context
6. Institutionalization of Research for Development
7. Research Networking
8. Donor Linkages
9. Access to Canadian Expertise
10. Targeted Capacity Building
11. Supportive & Comprehensive Monitoring
12. Expert Technical & Methodological Input
13. Intense Professional Commitment
14. Corporate Level Issues

Broadly speaking, these characteristics stem from, and are guided by, IDRC's fundamental corporate values and philosophy. First, the Centre is responsive to a Southern-defined research agenda and supports applied research that can contribute to social and economic development. Second, IDRC funding is not tied to Canadian goods, services, or partners and control for the research project is devolved to scientists and institutions in developing countries. Third, expert staff in Ottawa and the Regional Offices are able to support the research project by providing technical input and promoting networking and professional linkages. Lastly, IDRC Program Officers try to maintain close and regular contact with the research team throughout the duration of the project.

Step Two: Analysis of the Evaluation Reports

Although each characteristic of IDRC's approach is analyzed separately in this report, they should not be considered mutually exclusive. They are synergistic factors that interact and influence one another. IDRC Program Officers respond with the specific elements of the approach that need to be emphasized when developing and monitoring each project. The evaluation reports indicate that the characteristics viewed as influencing project outcome tend to come in clusters - not alone. Over a third of the evaluation reports noted that seven or more of the IDRC related characteristics influenced the implementation of the project, however, the overall average was five characteristics cited per report. (See Box 3)



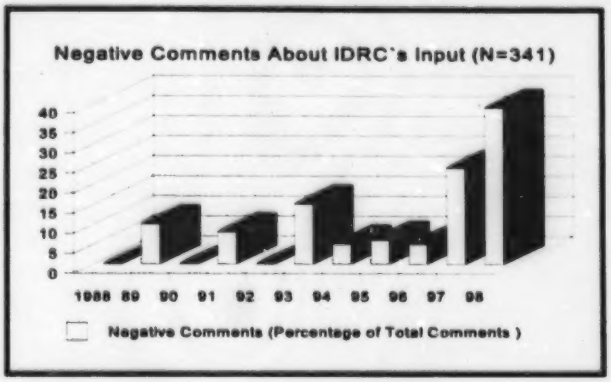
Characteristics Not Identified in the Evaluation Reports

In general, there is a high degree of congruence between the list of characteristics describing IDRC's approach to program delivery produced by the workshops and the determining factors identified in the evaluation reports. 84% of the determining factors were related to the IDRC characteristics. Nonetheless, five of the thirty activities specified by Centre staff were not identified in the evaluation reports as having a bearing on project outcome. These traits, therefore could not be incorporated in the present analysis. They are:

- Strategically screening project proposals;
- Determining the financial feasibility of a project to ensure the budget is in line with the objectives;
- Promoting interaction between researchers of varying experience and capability;
- The Program Officer's sense of vision, dedication, and commitment to the project;
- The Centre's high level of autonomy and political independence.

Determining whether these activities affect project outcomes is beyond the scope of this study. It shows only that these are not factors which are evident to evaluators as influencing the course of the projects. This is not surprising given that these characteristics are primarily internal to IDRC and would not be visible to recipients and evaluators.

Positive versus Negative Factors



In total, the evaluation reports listed 407 factors which influenced project outcome. Of these determining factors, 21% were negative. A negative comment meant that the factor was not, or was not sufficiently, present and the evaluator commented that its presence would have benefited the project. A positive factor was one that helped the project meet, or exceed, its stated objectives. This could include the influence of research results on local, regional, or national policy; a contribution to social and economic development; or, strengthening the research capacity of an institution and scientist. Examples of positive and negative comments from the sample of evaluations are offered throughout the report in shaded text boxes.

The evaluation reports also identified 66 factors influencing project outcomes other than those related to IDRC. They were categorized separately and are analyzed in the penultimate section of this paper. Of the 341 determining factors specifically addressing IDRC's approach to program delivery, only 12% were negative. Nonetheless, there has been an increase in the proportion of negative comments over the past decade. The evaluation reports prepared during the past three years contained over 60% of the total negative remarks made about IDRC's involvement with development research projects. It should be noted, however, that breaking down the negative comments by the year the evaluation report was prepared is not necessarily indicative of when the negative factor or missed opportunity occurred. Combined, the reports evaluated 267 IDRC projects and the majority of the reports evaluated multiple projects completed over varying periods.

Box 5: Number of Negative Comments (Percentage of the Total Comments per Characteristic)

Supportive and Comprehensive Monitoring (N=17)	7 (41%)
Flexible & Responsive Funding (N=27)	8 (30%)
Collegial Relationships with Research Partners (N=11)	2 (18%)
Institutionalization of Research for Dev't (N=49)	9 (18%)
Motivating for Research Quality (N=20)	2 (10%)
Expert Technical & Methodological Input (N=53)	5 (9%)
Access to Canadian Expertise (N=22)	2 (9%)
Talent Scouting & Spotting (N=24)	2 (8%)
Research Networking (N=37)	3 (8%)
Donor Linkages (N=16)	1 (6%)
Targeted Capacity Building (N=45)	1 (2%)
Linking Research to the Development Context (N=20)	0 (0%)

Moreover, the evaluation reports rarely indicated in which projects, and at what point, the problems occurred therefore it is not possible to be more precise in the timing of the project events to which the negative comments refer. Nonetheless, the evaluation reports indicate a definite trend. The number of negative comments about IDRC's performance are becoming more frequent. Between 1994 and 1996, the negative comments remained under 10% but in evaluation reports prepared in 1997 and 1998 they jumped to 24% and 39% respectively.

Of the seventeen comments on supportive and comprehensive monitoring, 41% were negative which makes it the characteristic with the highest ratio of negative comments. It is followed by flexible and responsive funding (30%); developing collegial relationships with research partners (18%); and, promoting the institutionalization of research for development (18%). For the rest of the characteristics, the negative comments amounted to fewer than 10%. (See Box 5)

The Characteristics of IDRC's Approach

1) Expert Technical and Methodological Input

The scientific and regional expertise of IDRC Program Officers provides them with the in-depth knowledge of the research area necessary to contribute to projects. The workshops identified four inputs that IDRC Program Officers contribute to projects: recommending new methods for designing and implementing the research project; effectively monitoring and suggesting potential application and uses for the research findings; putting researchers in touch with the latest literature in the research area; and, introducing relevant ICTs and research-related technologies. Almost 13% of the 407 determining factors in the evaluation reports addressed at least one of these. Providing expert technical and methodological input represents the most often cited characteristic influencing project outcome and is mentioned in twenty-five of the forty evaluation reports reviewed. (See Box 6 and Appendix 3 for a list of the number of evaluation reports that commented on each characteristic)

Box 6: Number of Times Characteristics were Identified in the Evaluation Reports (Percentage of the Total Number of Comments) (N=407)

Expert Technical & Methodological Input	13%
Institutionzalization of Research for Development	12%
Targeted Capacity Building	11%
Research Networking	9%
Flexible & Responsive Funding	7%
Talent Scouting & Spotting	6%
Access to Canadian Expertise	5%
Motivating for Research Quality	5%
Linking Research to the Development Context	5%
Supportive & Comprehensive Monitoring	4%
Donor Linkages	4%
Collegial Relationships with Research Partners	3%
Other Factors	16%

Thirteen evaluation reports addressed the value of IDRC staff suggesting new methodologies such as a participatory approach, multidisciplinarity, and/or a gender component. It seems that this is becoming increasingly important because almost all of the comments were made in reports prepared during the past four years. Participatory research has played a significant part in IDRC's approach since the Centre was founded. Five evaluation reports noted that having research beneficiaries participate in either the design and/or implementation of the project contributed to its success. There were only two negative comments and both stated that if the research methodologies had been modified to include gender or multi-disciplinarity the project would have yielded greater results. The importance of this factor is reinforced by Project Completion Reports (PCRs) which indicate that flexible approaches to methodology, particularly during the implementation of a project, may contribute to increasing the chance a project will meet its overall objectives.[2]

Factor: Expert Technical and Methodological Input

IDRC is now encouraging potential project leaders to develop projects that are closer to the needs of end-users and to actually involve them in the identification of their information needs. It has recognized the importance of learning about users' information needs and of delivering information products and services in accordance with specified needs, to ensure maximum project impact on users in the region. *Africa, Information, and Development: IDRC's Experience* (1994), 14

Six evaluation reports addressed IDRC's emphasis on the utilization of research findings. All of the comments were positive and the majority noted that the importance attached by IDRC to the potential uses of research results was beneficial. This was seen as contributing to project findings being commercially, scientifically, and politically applied. It also encouraged the research team to believe that their research could have significant effects in their communities and thus helped ensure that the momentum of the project was not lost.

Factor: Expert Technical and Methodological Input

When connected and functioning, HealthNet has proven to be a powerful tool for NHRC. It provides access to world-wide bibliographic materials and enables staff to participate in fora that would otherwise have been inaccessible. Furthermore, simply having an e-mail address gave NHRC's professional morale and national and international status a huge boost.

Origins and Achievements of the Navrongo Health Research Centre (1996), 5

Eight evaluation reports mentioned that IDRC assisted the research by improving access to

[2] Brian Moo Sang. "Analysis of Project Completion Reports." IDRC: Evaluation Unit, (March 1998).

information. This was considered valuable to the research teams. Providing access to relevant literature was accomplished either through electronic hook-ups, the IDRC library, or the establishment of documentation centres. In addition, ten evaluation reports commented that IDRC contributed to the success of the project by providing funding for field equipment, ICTs, and other research-related technologies. Only one of the comments was negative and this was because, unbeknownst to IDRC, the computers were sold at the end of the project.

2) Institutionalization of Research for Development

> **Factor: Institutionalization of Research for Development**
>
> "The funding of the Consortium has certainly helped to retain and attract high level researchers in Peru and in the member institutions. Largely thanks to this support young MAs and PhDs, with training abroad, could reinsert themselves in the Peruvian, academic centres. It is also important to stress that if it were not for the Consortium support, many economists would have left Peru. Financial support of the IDRC/CIDA project has been crucial in stabilizing the staff and the research capacity of the member institutions. The stable nature of the Consortium funding has allowed long-term research activities."
> *Report on the Economic Research Consortium* (1993), 13

Twenty-six evaluation reports commented on at least one of the three ways that IDRC has helped institutionalize development research in developing countries: by providing legitimacy and recognition of research for development; by creating linkages between the research team and policy makers; and, by providing fora for disseminating and review of research results. 12% of the 407 determining factors indicated that these contributed to project outcome.

Building the capacity of Southern institutions is one way IDRC protects the research environment. Seven evaluation reports commented on how IDRC support contributed to the development of sustainable research institutions that could attract, and keep, world class researchers. This process has helped reverse the scientific "brain drain" many developing countries experience.

IDRC attempts to enhance the awareness and status of the research it supports by providing researchers access to a wider and more influential audience. This generally means working to increase the value and recognition of the research at the local, regional, and/or national policy level. Twenty evaluation reports addressed this issue and four evaluation reports commented that the exclusion of policy makers negatively impacted the utilization of research results. In a similar vein, the *Project Leader Tracer Study* found that the majority of project leaders gained recognition with the national government as a result of their work on IDRC projects.[34][3]

[3] *The Project Leader Tracer Study* and *Impact Study of IDRC Supported Projects in the Areas of Social Policy, Public Goods, and Quality of Life* were both included in the sample of evaluation reports analyzed in this study.

Factor: Institutionalization of Research for Development

"Health training/Lao PDR might have had more reach had IDRC been more effectively available to serve as catalyst, doing the interministerial connecting that the culture of the bureaucracy did not allow the researchers to do." *Impact Study of IDRC Supported Projects in the Areas of Social Policy, Public Goods, and Quality of Life* (1998), 23.

"Nearly all the projects included either workshops, conferences, or meetings with relevant municipal and national government stakeholders. As a result, politicians, national government agencies and municipal authorities no longer consider groundwater resources to be inexhaustible. Instead, groundwater resources are considered limited, severely over exploited and susceptible to contamination from a variety of sources."
Urban Water Management Research at IDRC: Impacts, Lessons Learned, and Recommendations (1995), 37.

IDRC provides its partner researchers and institutions fora for peer review and the means to disseminate research results. Ten evaluation reports commented on this input. It was seen to have increased the visibility of the project, improved impact, decreased the isolation Southern researchers were experiencing, and allowed researchers to keep abreast of current research and share relevant experiences with colleagues. The *Impact Study of IDRC Supported Projects in the Areas of Social Policy, Public Goods, and Quality of Life* report, however, concluded that although research results were disseminated through documents, workshops, and networks, they focussed solely on broadening the body of scientific information and concepts.[4] The research results were not interpreted for users and thus their potential impact was hindered.

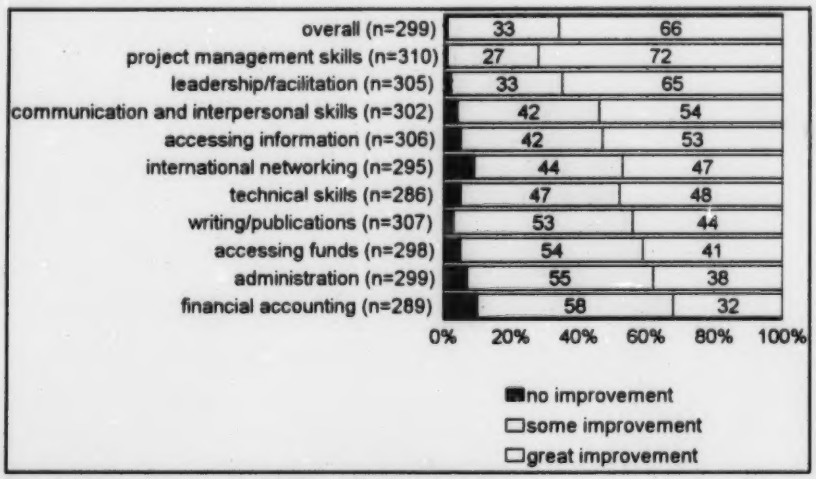
3) Targeted Capacity Building

Factor: Targeted Capacity Building

"There are at least two fundamental stages that precede this traditional development assistance approach in a country such as Cambodia. The first is developing the most rudimentary physical and institutional requirements to even begin a program. Hence the labourious attention that the IDRC has given to such basic tasks as the procurement of office furniture, computers, and telephones. Similarly, language training, basic technical training, and establishment of simple information management systems was also a priority."
IDRC's Environment Program in Cambodia: An Assessment of the First Two Years (1995), 7

Identifying and responding to the training and institutional strengthening needs of Southern researchers and institutions has been fundamental to IDRC's work since its inception. 11% of the 407 determining factors identified this as contributing to project outcome and one comment found its absence to have negatively affected the project. References to capacity building were found in twenty-five evaluation reports surveyed although half simply describe training supported by IDRC.

The Project Leader Tracer Study addressed the role the Centre has played in building the research capacity of past project leaders. (See Box 7) It concluded that IDRC's support has directly strengthened researchers' skills and thereby enhanced their personal profiles and career advancement. This has been accomplished primarily through experience in project management, participation in training sessions, and networking with program staff.[22] However, the report also observed a negative trend in recent years and commented, "Direct contact between staff and researchers has been an important source of IDRC's effectiveness in capacity building. The perceived decline in direct contact between program staff and project leaders may indicate constraints that have potential ramifications for capacity building and the quality of research results."[xi]



Box 7: Improvements in Skills of Project Leaders
Source: The Project Leader Tracer Study by S. Salewicz and A. Dwivedi, 1996

4) *Research Networking Within the Scientific Community*

Nine percent of the factors identified as influencing project outcome involved research networking among scientists. The majority of the twenty-four evaluation reports that addressed this issue praised IDRC's ability to link scientists working in related fields. Most of the evaluation reports listed the technical benefits that resulted from professional partnerships while others commented on improved research credentials, access to information, international contacts, and training opportunities.

Factor: Research Networking

"To this end, the project was designed to bring together four different research and educational institutions within Vietnam so as to encourage the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas regarding urban poverty and policy responses. In this respect, the project was itself highly innovative in that it created a framework for interaction between institutions which in formal terms had never previously worked together."
Shelter and Environmental Improvement for the Urban Poor, (1996) 2.

5) Flexible and Responsive Funding

Almost 7% of the 407 determining factors addressed the importance of flexible and responsive funding. It was mentioned in fifteen evaluation reports. Six evaluation reports complemented the Centre's willingness to support research not funded by other donors. In this area, the comments were positive; the funds were perceived to have helped vitalize research areas that otherwise would have been neglected.

IDRC is responsive to the research priorities and needs of users in developing countries and six reports referred to the importance of IDRC encouraging recipients to participate in project development and help set funding priorities.

Where criticisms were levelled, however, was in relation to timing issues. Six evaluation reports noted delays in the remittance of funds that had interrupted the progress of the project or that members of the research team felt that there had been a premature termination of the research activity. Commenting on how premature closure negatively affects impact, *The Impact Study of IDRC Supported Projects in the Areas of Social Policy, Public Goods, and Quality of Life* concluded that it would be advantageous for IDRC to implement a six-month "post-project completion" phase to focus on research utilization.

Factor: Flexible and Responsive Funding

"IDRC's information strategy for Africa has been a very effective tool for directing and coordinating its project activities and for setting its program priorities in the African Continent based on their expressed needs. It has proved to be an effective tool through which a donor agency, such as IDRC, can respond to the expressed needs of grant-recipient countries as opposed to providing support in areas where the need is felt merely by donors."
Africa, Information, and Development: IDRC's Experience (1994), 18

6) Talent Scouting and Spotting

Factor: Talent Scouting & Spotting

"The best research centres of Peru are in the Consortium. Only exceptionally is a good researcher not in any of its member institutions. The institutions of the Consortium are highly respected by the Peruvian academic community, and by many non-academic distinguished Peruvians."
Report of the Economic Research Consortium (1993), 5.

"Though somewhat better established now, the centre was at the start of the project a relatively new institution in need of establishing a track record professionally and of consolidating itself in terms of resources and infrastructure. Its main strength lay in the professional capacity and personal commitment of its Director and core staff and its need to prove its institutional credibility."
Resource Costs of Under-Nutrition and Morbidity; Informal Sector Street Food; and Inland Fisheries Impact Case Studies (1997), 2.

Almost 6% of the 407 determining factors related to the choice of project participants. Thirteen evaluation reports commented on how the type of institution (government versus academic) and the experience, leadership, technical competence, network, and dedication of the project leader affected the project. *The Impact Study of IDRC Supported Projects in the Areas of Social Policy, Public Goods, and Quality of Life*, confirmed this by concluding that leadership is a key factor determining impact.

> *"Not surprisingly, projects which were competently done e.g. realized their objectives and/or achieved impact, tended to be those with project leaders who had status, professional capacity and credibility within their institutions, who were committed to fostering its development; or who were able to make contacts and draw on networks to promote research results. Where these characteristics were missing, the capacity of the project appeared to be weakened, whether to produce technically good research, or to reach out to potential users through its implementation and its products in ways which might have fostered input."[9]*

Finding an appropriate project leader or institution is evidently important yet there is a certain element of risk involved because IDRC is often dealing with partners who lack a proven track record for carrying out international research projects. However, it appears that in the cases sampled, the Centre was adept at identifying partners who contributed beneficially to projects because only two of the evaluation reports suggested that the leadership or participants were inappropriate to handle the challenges of the project.

7) Access to Canadian Experts

Factor: Access to Canadian Experts

"A further constraint on the project which is related to project design is the limited role that the Canadian advisors were able to play in the implementation of the project. This was a direct consequence of the limited funding available to support the Canadian advisors, and derives from the long-standing IDRC policy of focussing spending on developing country institutions, rather than on supporting Canadian involvement. ...A greater degree of information sharing and direct collaboration between the Vietnamese institutions could have been fostered by more extensive involvement of Canadian advisors."
Shelter and Environmental Improvement for the Urban Poor (1996), 33

"An important, and perhaps, underestimated contribution made by the IDRC has been the development of what can be termed "collaboration capacity". In effect, Canadian research agencies involved in IDRC-supported projects have been provided with the skills and experience necessary to conduct research in developing countries which result in the effective transfer of soft and hard technologies."
Urban Water Management Research at IDRC: Impacts, Lessons Learned, and Recommendations (1995), 32

Although IDRC support for research is not focussed on Canadian institutions, the Centre regularly provides Southern partners access to Canadian experts and institutions. It does this by facilitating linkages with Canadian researchers, private companies, government agencies, research institutions, and universities. Over 5% of the 407 determining factors addressed this issue. This characteristic was mentioned in fourteen evaluation reports and only two viewed the international linkages negatively. Overwhelmingly, the Canadian-South partnerships were viewed as having improved the technical progress of the research project by, for example, providing training, scientific input, or technological innovations. The two negative comments indicated that the project and/or institution would have benefited from even greater involvement by Canadian experts.

The transfer of knowledge is not uni-directional, however, and four evaluation reports commented on how Canadians benefited from partnerships with Southern researchers and institutions. In one case, it resulted in access to China's advanced technology in Brassica hybrids while in another it began a long term relationship between Canadian and Mexican universities.

8) Motivating for Research Quality

5% of the 407 factors in the evaluation reports that were considered to have had an affect on project outcome were related to IDRC's ability to motivate researchers. Three evaluation reports addressed the non-monetary incentives that prompt participants to want to work on IDRC-supported projects. These included the desire to improve their knowledge and technical skills, the social contribution that the research can make in their country, and the international exposure and professional linkages it can foster. In a similar vein, the *Project Leader Tracer Study* assessed the level of influence seven factors had on encouraging project leaders to seek IDRC support. The majority of respondents indicated that they were motivated by a desire to obtain non-monetary assistance with their research. (See Box 8)

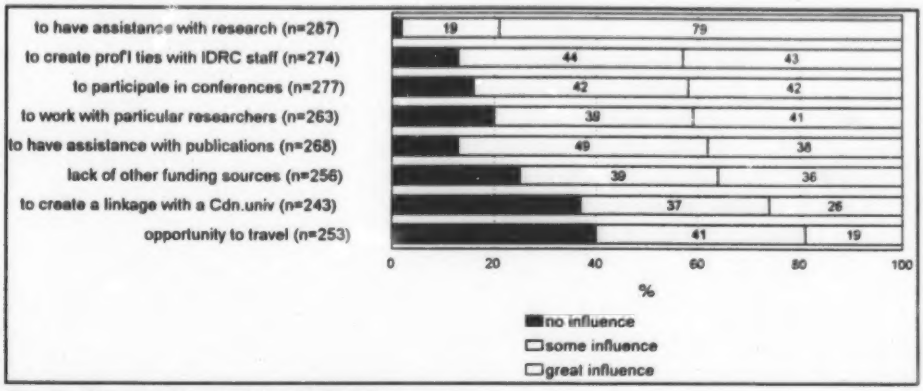
Factor: Motivating for Research Quality

"A network must be owned by its members if it is to be sustainable. The Oilcrops Network was initiated by IDRC and largely controlled by IDRC. The network was largely a series of actions by the adviser. Network development was strongly influenced by directions felt to be important to IDRC. IDRC funding constrained independent actions by the members, and to some extent prevented more effective networking between countries."
Evaluation of Oilseed Network (Ethiopia): Final Report (1991)

"Thus the Centre's support is widely perceived to have been empowering in nature in that it has helped create a national capacity to manage and run its own research and development programme."
Inland Fisheries Impact Study (1997)

IDRC's approach to development research is based on allowing the researchers to control their projects. Twelve evaluation reports mentioned that this strategy motivated the research team to achieve high-quality scientific work. The two evaluation reports that noted that IDRC had not operated in this manner were explicit in their condemnation and stated that it negatively influenced the implementation and/or outcome of the research project. (See the text-box above for a quote from an evaluation report criticizing IDRC's actions in this regard.) The *Impact Study of IDRC Supported Projects in the Areas of Social Policy, Public Goods, and Quality of Life* noted a finding in terms of impact which reinforced the importance of this aspect of motivation:

> *"While perhaps not a factor on a grand scale, and certainly difficult to quantify, it seems logical that the more participants understand and agree upon purpose and have a sense of buying-in, the more care and energy they will bring to it. The issue might also be expressed as there being in the project a sense of ownership, of participants knowing where it and they were going, able to manage is direction (including the right and responsibility to make changes as needed) and ensuring the usefulness of its results."[21]*



Box 8: Reasons for Seeking IDRC Support
Source: The Project Leader Tracer Study by S. Salewicz and A. Dwivedi, 1996

9) Linking Research to the Development Context

Factor: Linking Research to the Development Context

The Centre understands the enormous strain that HIV/AIDS has on already exhausted and overburdened health care systems in developing countries. IDRC has therefore supported the development of a simple, rapid, reliable, and affordable method for HIV detection.
Evaluation Report of IDRC-Supported HIV/AIDS Research Projects (1995), 9

In recognition of the need to include women in the development process, ISSD has supported information-related projects which focus on women, and general projects which integrate women. This support has produced valuable research findings which influence policy decisions on women, and have increased the overall visibility of women's issues and their role in development.
Analysis of the Approach to Addressing Gender Issues in ISSD (1993), 1

5% of the 407 factors viewed as influencing project outcome addressed IDRC's ability to link the research being conducted to the development context. This involves three aspects of the Centre's work when deciding to fund a research area: first, understanding and respecting the development context in a given country or region; second, recognizing the value and relevance of a research issue; and third, assisting the researchers to identify development problems and setting relevant research tasks. It is encouraging to note that the Centre seems to be effective in supporting research projects whose results can be applied to the development context in Southern countries because, although it was mentioned in eleven evaluation reports, none of the comments were negative.

10) Supportive and Comprehensive Monitoring

4% of the 407 determining factors viewed as influencing project outcome dealt with IDRC's monitoring. The importance of close and regular contact with the project leader and research site was stressed in eleven evaluation reports. IDRC has attempted to maintain this close contact through visits by Program Officers to project sites and their frequent correspondence with researchers. However, findings indicate that IDRC needs to improve in this regard because seven of the seventeen comments indicated inadequate monitoring. Furthermore, all of the negative comments were found in different reports prepared since 1991 which suggests that the problem of inadequate time to devote to monitoring is becoming more acute. This is, at least partially, related to the Centre's restructuring which resulted in a number of orphaned projects.

Factor: Supportive and Comprehensive Monitoring

"Specialists at IDRC's ASRO in Singapore, in Vietnam and IDRC headquarters in Ottawa have been used to monitor projects and provide technical assistance. The most common request from Vietnamese participating institutions was for increased and more regular Canadian assistance."
Vietnam/Indochina Sustainable Economic Development Programme (1995), 16

The project did not have the benefits of visits by IDRC programme staff, networking or exchange of ideas with other IDRC funded projects in the same field, or any other intangible inputs from the Centre in the form of discussions, advice, encouragement, or feedback on on-going work. It would not be too much of an exaggeration to describe the project as an "orphaned project" what with the twin occurrences of the terminal illness and subsequent demise of the initiating PO and the downsizing of the regional offices in Delhi and its being passed on, along with a fistful of other such projects, to program staff in Ottawa already preoccupied with other activities. While mere conjecture at this point, it is not difficult to imagine that the course of this project could have been very different had the Centre played a more proactive and supportive part."
Resource Costs of Under-Nutrition and Morbidity; Informal Sector Street Food; and, Inland Fisheries Impact Cast Studies (1997), 3

Program Officers have corroborated the view that the direct involvement of program staff is critical to project performance and the utilization of research results in their PCRs. In 15% (20/130) of responses to the project management question, the writers commented on problems arising from a change in Program Officers during the implementation of the research project. Regardless of the reason for the personnel change, monitoring by a succession of Program Officers was deemed to have a negative impact on projects. Some of the problems identified in the PCRs include: lost and misplaced documents, reports, and project outputs; interruption in or inadequate monitoring; communication breakdown; lack of continuity; and delays in releasing funds and closing the file.

Although contact between IDRC staff and researchers has been an important source of IDRC's comparative advantage in the past, the *Project Leader Tracer Study* revealed that this level of direct contact is on the decline. The percentage of project leaders who reported very extensive collaboration with program staff declined from a high of 76% in the 1970s to 55% in 1991-1994.[ix] The study concluded that this could potentially have serious ramifications on both capacity building and the quality of research results. The *Impact Study of IDRC Supported Projects in the Areas of Social Policy, Public Goods, and Quality of Life* arrived at a similar conclusion: "Development of new projects, disbursing new budgets, have higher priorities than monitoring existing activities. Limited time and travel budgets are spent accordingly".[24]

11) Donor Linkages

Factor: Donor Linkages

"Several of the respondents stated that the prestige of IDRC's support of telematics has given them the leverage to obtain additional funds nationally and internationally."
Evaluation of IDRC's Telematics Program (1990), 14.

"IDRC attempts to develop program partnerships with other major players, as appropriate, to avoid duplication and to focus efforts on key issues. A particular strategic element in the Environment Program in Cambodia has been to negotiate with other donors for the financing of particular elements of the program."
IDRC Environment Program in Cambodia: An Assessment of the First Two Years (1995), 10.

IDRC can act as a catalyst to help recipient institutions and researchers obtain additional donor funding. 4% of the 407 determining factors documented this input by IDRC. Of the eleven evaluation reports that mentioned it, only one commented that the additional support had not helped the project and that was a case where contact between the recipient institution and the UNDP had not yet progressed beyond preliminary interviews.

12) Collegial Relationships with Research Partners

Factor: Collegial Relationships with Research Partners

During the whole period 1989-1993, relations between IDRC, in charge of administering the funds and overseeing the project, and the member institutions have been frictionless. The Peruvian scholars that I interviewed unanimously mentioned the cordiality of the relations.
Report of the Economic Research Consortium (1993), 10

3% of the 407 determining factors commented on professional relationships that developed between Centre staff and members of the research team. Two of the comments were negative although none of the remarks in the nine evaluation reports that addressed this issue were very substantive. It was not evident how this factor specifically contributed to the success of the project beyond the fact that good donor-recipient relations were appreciated by the research team.

Other Factors Influencing Project Outcome

16% of the 407 factors identified in the evaluation reports as influencing project outcome were unrelated to, or beyond, IDRC's influence. These other factors are independent of IDRC involvement and are therefore categorized separately. 70% of the time these factors were mentioned, they were viewed as having had a negative influence on the project. In all cases, the evaluator made no reference to whether IDRC did, or could have, intervened to rectify the problem. These 66 comments can be grouped into the six categories below, ordered according to the prevalence with which they appeared in the evaluation reports:

1. **External Environment**: 25% of the 66 other factors addressed the effect that the policy, political, economic, or natural environment had on the project site. Three-quarters of the comments were seen to have impeded the implementation and/or outcome of the projects.

2. **Participants**: 19% related to the characteristics and actions of a particular project participant. This is the only category in which the positive comments outnumbered the negative. (69% versus 31%)

3. **Technical Issues:** 18% of the comments dealt with the technical problems encountered and the solutions found by the researchers during the implementation of the project.

4. **Funding and Human Resource Constraints:** 18% of the factors addressed a financial or staff constraint at the recipient institution. Generally, these comments related to what could have been done better had they had more money or more scientists.

5. **Access to Information:** 12% of the comments addressed inadequate access to, and knowledge of, information sources and use of the press to publicize research issues.

6. **Strained Relations:** 7% of the factors offered examples of how an institution or individual negatively influenced the project because of their unwillingness to cooperate with their research partners.

Conclusion

Summary of Results

From the analysis of the findings from forty evaluation reports, six conclusions can be drawn:

1. There is a congruence between the characteristics of the IDRC approach as defined in the workshops and the factors that evaluators reported affect project outcomes. Only five of the thirty characteristics identified in the workshops with Centre staff were not commented on in the evaluation reports. Furthermore, 84% of the determining factors identified in the evaluation reports were related to the IDRC characteristics.

2. According to the number of times they were commented on in the evaluation reports, the four most important characteristics of IDRC's approach to program delivery are:

    a) **providing expert technical and methodological input** to the research team (suggesting new research methods or potential applications for research results; helping ensure access to information and literature; and, introducing relevant technologies) (13%);

    b) **promoting the institutionalization of research for development** (encouraging researchers to return or stay in developing countries; increasing the value of the research at the policy level; and, providing fora for the dissemination and peer review of research results) (12%);

    c) identifying and responding to the training needs of researchers and institutions to **build their research capacity** (11%);

    d) **promoting research networking** within the scientific community (9%).

    Although individually these percentages seem somewhat insignificant, this is to be expected given the number of characteristics involved in the IDRC approach. Furthermore, the characteristics do not operate in isolation and it is when they are combined together in clusters that they have the greatest influence on project outcome. For instance, the four characteristics cited above represent 45% of the factors identified by evaluators as influencing project outcome and twenty-four of the forty evaluation reports mentioned three or all four of these characteristics in them.

3. According to the evaluation reports sampled, the number of negative comments about IDRC's involvement with development research projects is on the rise. In total, 12% of the 341 determining factors related to IDRC were negative; however, they are becoming more frequent. Between 1994 and 1996, the negative comments remained under 10% but in 1997 and 1998 they jumped to 24% and 39% respectively.

4. The analysis indicates that IDRC is not providing sufficient and efficient monitoring. The issue needs to be examined further but the evidence collected from the evaluation reports suggests that the problem is becoming more acute. 41% (7/17) of the determining factors related to IDRC monitoring were negative and the majority of these comments were made in evaluation reports prepared during the past three years. Both Project Leaders and Program Officers have noted that downsizing and restructuring at the Centre has negatively affected project monitoring by creating a number of orphaned projects and this is affecting the implementation of Centre-supported research projects.

5. The determining factors are not mutually exclusive; they come in clusters. A quarter of the evaluation reports noted that eight or more of the fourteen IDRC characteristics influenced the implementation of the project. The overall average was five characteristics per report.

6. Three of the four IDRC characteristics most commonly listed in the evaluation reports as influencing project outcome had relatively few negative comments, less than 10%, about IDRC's performance. These were providing expert technical and methodological input, targeted capacity building, and, promoting research networking within the scientific community.

Recommendations for Further Research

Future research could take a number of different directions and a potentially useful study would look at IDRC's place among other development research funding agencies and how it complements their work. An organization can always improve and IDRC could potentially learn from the approaches of other organizations funding development research. Any valuable comparison would first require clarification on a number of methodological issues: 1) which organizations can IDRC properly be compared with; 2) which part(s) of the organizations need to be compared and based on what criteria; and (3), what internal and external factors have contributed to the success of other organizations and are they adaptable to IDRC's situation.

A study assessing the external environment in which IDRC operates would yield valuable insights into the niche where IDRC's limited resources have the most effect. There is no doubt that the global research environment has changed since IDRC began operating in 1970. The questions to be explored would be: What are the characteristics of this change and which ones most affect IDRC's mandate and mode of operation? How has the increasing capacity of Southern researchers and institutions, the involvement of multiple donors, and greater funding opportunities for development research changed IDRC's role in the international community? Given the relatively small amount of money IDRC contributes to the global research for development "envelope", what important role could it play to complement the work of national, regional, and other donor organizations? Which niche area(s) should the Centre focus its attention on?

Appendix 1: List of Evaluation Reports

Africa, Information, and Development: IDRC's Experience (1994) by Martha Melesse and Shamid Akhtar

African Economic Research Consortium: Research Training, and Related Activities (1990) by Knud Erik Svendsen

Analysis of IDRC Funded Projects Relevant to Desertification (1993) by WARO

Analysis of the Approach to Addressing Gender Issues in the Information Sciences and Systems Division (1993) by Hedat Berhane

Annotated Mid-Project Evaluation: Snow and Ice Hydrology (Pakistan) (1994) by Sylvain Dufour and Nancy George

Assessment of the IDRC Project: Bamboo Mat Board (India) (1992) by V.N.P. Mathur

Building National Capacity in the Social Sciences: Asia (1988) by Bryant Hearl

CODESRIA: Report of the Auto Evaluation 1996 (1997) by Codesria

Commercialization of the Unimade Handpump: An Evaluation (1992) by Sieh Lee Mei Ling

Evaluation of IDRC's Library Services to Projects (1989) by C.G.S. Harris

Evaluation of IDRC's Telematics Program (1990) by Anna Stahmer

Evaluation of Oilseed Network (Ethiopia): Final Report (1991) by Thomas Development Associates

Evaluation of Technology Transfer Projects for Small and Medium Sized Industries in Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand (1991) by John A. Holub

Evaluation of the Economy and Environment Program for SE Asia (1996) by Mohan Munasinghe

Evaluation of the Latin American Aquaculture Network (1991) by Lisa Moreau

Evaluation Report of IDRC-Supported HIV/AIDS Research Projects (1995) by Zeinab Adan

External Evaluation of the Consortium for the Sustainable Development of the Andean Ecoregion (CONDESAN) Lima, Peru (1996) by Nicolas Mateo, Kenneth Brown, and Edward Weber

External Evaluation of the GlobeSAR Project (1997) by Ferdinand Bonn

Farming Systems (Vietnam) (1995) by Benchaplun Shinawatra

Final Evaluation Report of IDRC Project 88-0141 "The Dissemination of Agricultural Information to Young Farmers in North-West and South-West Provinces" (1991) by Ajaga Nji

IDRC Environment Program in Cambodia: An Assessment of the First Two Years (1995) by Kirk Talbott

IDRC Information Science Projects and Priorities in Sri Lanka (1989) by Rohan Samarajiva

Impact Study of IDRC-Supported Projects in the Areas of Social Policy, Public Goods, and Quality of Life (1998) by Anne Bernard and Tricia Wind

Milk Production Systems Project (Guyana): Evaluation Report (1991) by Gustavo Cubillos, Victor Ganoza, and Fernando Garcia

Network of Networks: Latin America (1994) by Warren Thorngate

Origins and Achievements of the Navrongo Health Research Centre (1996) by Terry Smutylo, Sarah Earl, and Beth Richardson

Pan Asian Networking Project: A Survey of Communications Activities (1997) by Michael Graham

Project Effectiveness, Administrative Load, Cost-Efficiency, and Project Size: Exploring the Inter-Relationship (1993) by Marielle Rowan

Project Leader Tracer Study (1996) by Stephen Salewicz and Archana Dwivedi

Project moustiquaires impregnées et le controle communautaire du paludisme au Benin (1997) by Yawo Assigbley

Project Review: Research Project on Natural Resource Management in Communal Lands (1991) by L.E. Munjanganja and R.H.V. Bell

Report of the Economic Research Consortium, Peru (1993) by Juan Antonio Morales

Resource Costs of Under-Nutrition and Morbidity; Informal Sector Street Food; and, Inland Fisheries Impact Case Studies(Nepal) (1997) by Manjul Bajaj

Review of IDRC Funded China/Canada Rapeseed Project (1991) by John Dueck

Shelter and Environmental Improvement for the Urban Poor (1996) by Michael Leaf

Urban Water Management Research at the IDRC: Impacts, Lessons Learned, and Recommendations for Future Research (1995) by Michel Frojmovic

Utilization of Research Results (1993) by W. Couto and C. Sere

Vietnam/Indochina Sustainable Economic Development Programme (VISED) CIDA Project No. 976/18213 (1995) by Orest Nowosad and Ted Ramsay

Wood Utilization (China): Inspection Report (1989) by S. Chow

Work of Research in Development: An Impact Assessment of IDRC-Supported Occupational Health and Safety Projects (1996) by Blair Rutherford

Appendix 2: Defining IDRC's Approach to Program Delivery: Synthesis of Workshops Held February 11, 1998 & February 17, 1998

Focus Question: What does IDRC (program staff) do to contribute to the development and implementation of an effective development research project?

1. Talent Scouting & Spotting

- 1.1 identifying researchers and institutions with potential (ie leadership qualities, competence, dedication, and capacity potential)
- 1.2 strategic screening of project proposal

2. Flexible and Responsive Funding

- 2.1 responsive to the priorities and needs of users in developing countries (research ideas initiated and implemented in the developing countries)
- 2.2 determining the financial feasibility of a project to ensure that the budget is in line with the project objectives
- 2.3 supporting research that might not be funded by other donors
- 2.4 being flexible when making funding decisions and making decisions based on close contact with the researchers (ie being able to fund unforseen or difficult to obtain items)

3. Motivating for Research Quality

- 3.1 not controlling the project but providing the tools to allow the research team to have full ownership of the project thereby motivating them towards a high level of research quality
- 3.2 providing the non-monetary incentives that motivates researchers to get involved in the project (ie participation will further the researcher's career path, create linkages with other scientists, etc.)

4. Collegial Relationships with Research Partners

- 4.1 having the PO participate as a partner, not the leader
- 4.2 helping researchers reach their own goals while also focussing on setting clear and reachable goals given funding levels, time frames, and resources (setting achievable objectives)

5. Linking Research to the Development Context

- 5.1 recognizing the value and relevance of a research area or issue
- 5.2 understanding and respecting the development context in a given setting
- 5.3 assisting with the identification of development problems and helping set key research issues

6. Institutionalization of Research for Development

- 6.1 protecting the research environment by providing legitimacy and recognition of research for development
- 6.2 enhancing the awareness and status of research being conducted by providing access to a wider and more influential audience (ie increasing the value of the research at the national policy level)
- 6.3 providing fora for dissemination and peer review of research results

7. Research Networking

- 7.1 facilitating linkages and networking within the scientific community and with policy makers, and other research users
- 7.2 promoting interaction between researchers who have different levels of experience and capability (ie putting junior researchers in touch with more experienced scientists)

8. Donor Linkages

- 8.1 promoting linkages with other donors who might be able to offer support or collaborate on projects

9. Access to Canadian Expertise

- 9.1 facilitating linkages with expert Canadian researchers, private companies, government agencies, research institutions, and universities

10. Targeted Capacity Building

- 10.1 identifying and responding to training needs of researchers
- 10.2 identifying and responding to training and institutional strengthening needs of recipient institutions

11. Supportive and Comprehensive Monitoring

- 11.1 close and regular contact with the project leader and the project site throughout the project (visiting the project site, availability and timeliness of responding to email, faxes, phone calls...) encourages, supports, and promotes excellence among the research team, quickly alleviates problems, and helps avoid surprises and crises

12. Expert Technical & Methodological Input

12.1 suggesting new methods and issues to be considered in designing and implementing a research project (ie participatory approach, multidisciplinarity, gender)

12.2 providing input on monitoring and evaluation and potential application and use of the research

12.3 putting researchers in touch with latest literature and providing them with research information (library services doing bibliographic searches, publication services...)

12.4 introducing relevant ICT technology

13. Intense Professional Commitment

13.1 having a sense of vision, dedication, and commitment to the project

14. Corporate Level Issues

14.1 IDRC has a high level of autonomy and political independence

14.2 ideally, the impact of donor corporate change on recipients should be minimized and it should provide a stable decision making and policy environment throughout the entire process of a project (not achieved during the transition at IDRC)

Appendix 3: Number of Evaluation Reports that Commented on Each Characteristic of IDRC's Approach to Program Delivery

Number of Evaluation Reports that Commented on Each Characteristic (N=40)	
Institutionalization of Research for Development	26
Expert Technical & Methodological Input	25
Targeted Capacity Building	25
Research Networking	24
Flexible & Responsive Funding	15
Access to Canadian Expertise	14
Motivating for Research Quality	14
Talent Scouting & Spotting	13
Linking Research to the Development Context	11
Supportive & Comprehensive Monitoring	11
Donor Linkages	11
Collegial Relationships with Research Partners	9
Other Factors	24